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Reflections questionnaire response by Mary Cote on March 27, 2021

Mary Cote

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Respondent

< 8 Anonymous >

106:50
Time to complete

1. Name - please select "anonymous" or enter your name in the "other" field. *

☐ Anonymous

☒ Mary Cote

2. What is your relationship to Bowdoin? *

☐ Student

☐ Faculty

☒ Staff

☐ Alumni

☐ Other

3. If applicable, what is your Bowdoin class year?

4. Has your connection to Bowdoin changed during the pandemic? If so, how?

5. What has it been like to teach/learn/work remotely/continue to work in person?

I worked remotely for the first few months and found that I could not wait to get back into the actual office. Since June it has only been myself and one other co-worker in the office and I have not seen some of my co-workers in person for almost a year now. My work has changed during the pandemic and I've been working many long hours and over the weekends for the past year. There feels like less separation between work and home. Since people are working at all times of the day and week - there is a much higher expectation for a response at all hours and days of the week and it's just necessary with the work I am charged with. I manage employees who are calling out with Covid-19 symptoms, who need to quarantine from an exposure or who have tested positive and need to isolate. I talk to employees who have lost loved ones and endured other losses and who are going through difficult things every day. After a year it does not appear to be letting up and it feels discouraging.

6. Who and what comforted you during this time? What has sustained you?

My husband. If not for him, I don't think I could have managed and I hope I have done the same for him. We celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary in December of 2020 and have raised 4 children and we now have 4 grandchildren. We've gone through a lot of ups and downs in life together and more than ever I love and appreciate him so very much. We have a lot of very dear friends, having grown up and lived in this area all our lives, but during the pandemic we've not been able to see our friends very much and have relied on each other more and more.

7. What is one thing you created or learned during the last year?

I never could have imagined that being asked to wear a mask or stay home in the middle of a global health crisis while hundreds of thousands of people were dying worldwide would have sparked so much anger and animosity in my fellow human beings. I have to say I'm a little disappointed. I thought when this first began that people would unite more and naturally follow the science. That the pandemic has been politicized in this way is just very sad. I know everyone is hurting either mentally, physically, financially or in all ways, but I hoped people would unite rather than divide to get through this.

8. What have been your social connections in this time of physical isolation?

We had some very funny Zoom happy hours with friends. I bought some snow pants and other warm winter gear and we've had a few nice outside gatherings this winter in very small groups around a fire in the snow. I'm not normally a winter person, but you do what you have to in a pandemic! I used to like to be on the go every day and see my friends and family all the time so it was a big change and I do miss them all very much. I hope they won't all forget how much I love them and enjoy their company. My daughter's baby just

turned one in late March of 2021. We had a little party just with my daughter and her husband and their 5 year old and only us and the other grandparents (who I've known since I was 5 and who are my very dear friends). After this whole year of missing so much it was just the best afternoon ever and we could not help ourselves but to give hugs all around. My 5 year old granddaughter, April, started actual in-person school in late January of 2021. One day she got off the bus after school and told her father she got in trouble on the bus. Her father said "What happened dear? I'm sure it's okay". April told her father "I met a new friend and we took down our masks because we wanted to see each other's smile and the bus driver yelled - put your masks back on!" Everyone wants to see each other smile - don't you think?

9. Which moments will you remember? What would you like to forget?

I remember being very afraid and feeling hopeless. I have had a lifelong problem with asthma. I've been in the hospital quite often as a child and into adulthood and I know what it feels like to not be able to breathe. I had myself convinced for a long time that I would get Covid-19 and would not survive. My husband is in his 60's and I heard of couples passing away within weeks of each other. He is a welder at the shipyard in Bath (he's worked there since he was 18) and I worried every day he'd catch the virus at work. I got out our Will and organized everything and wrote notes to the children to put along with it so they would know how to handle everything. I didn't tell my husband. This I would like to forget. My youngest daughter got married in August of 2020. She only wanted a very small wedding anyway, but we agonized on what to do. In early August the daily case rates were as low as they had been at any point in the pandemic and we finally decided on a small backyard wedding with only siblings and parents. My husband and I had worked all summer to make the yard look nice not knowing if there would be a wedding or not. We rented a tent with a very small dance floor and lights and decorated with flowers. There were 20 people and I've got to say it was the nicest most romantic little wedding and I'll always remember how happy we all were.

10. If you'd known that you'd be so isolated for so long, what might you have done differently?

At first it was so scary. Really total isolation, difficult to obtain things from the grocery store, confusion and not knowing what was happening and how it would unfold. I watched the news "way" too much as if I would miss something and not know what was going on or be prepared. When things first shut down and we left the office - my coworker and I remember thinking - well in a few weeks or maybe a month we'll be back! I'm almost glad I didn't know it would go on for so long in the beginning because it would have been more difficult to take.

11. Have you had COVID-19 and/or have you been vaccinated against COVID-19? What was that like?

No, thankfully I have not had Covid-19. My husband got his first dose of the vaccine and is getting his 2nd dose at the end of this week. I am getting my first dose today (3/27/21) and I am so happy. My daughter, who works at a daycare/nursery school, just got her 1st dose last week. I had a difficult time getting my mother (age 89) an appointment, but finally did and it was such a relief. She's had both doses now. We have quite a few friends in their 50's and 60's like us and it's so funny that everyone is so excited to get the vaccine. I hear from them all the time when someone gets an appointment like they won the lottery! I know people and my husband hears from people at work who won't get it and some even think it's some kind of conspiracy theory thing the government is trying to impose on us. Oh my lord, can you believe it? These people make me feel discouraged. We should all be embracing it and getting it when it's available to each of us. For each other and the world as a whole. It's the only chance at life returning to some thing that remotely resembles pre-Covid life as we knew it.

12. Several significant news events have occurred during the pandemic, including the antiracist uprising, the U.S. presidential election, and the insurrection at the Capitol. Was your experience of these events impacted by the pandemic? If so, how?

Again, I have been disappointed by some of my fellow human beings. These events have been just too much to take in the middle of a pandemic. I never realized how many people believed all this conspiracy theory crap (excuse my language). President Trump did nothing to bring people together, which is what we needed and will always need. He really scared me actually and I'm afraid he might run for president again. For the Capitol insurrection, I could not believe what I was seeing and will never understand.

13. What are the challenges you are currently facing?

I'm just feeling worn down. After all this time and with the cases really not diminishing like I had hoped and new variants emerging it's just discouraging. It feels like people have just given up and want to do what they want regardless of the outcome and how it impacts others.

14. If you are self-isolating with family, how is that impacting your experience?

My heart breaks for people who have to isolate alone and don't have a good support network. Again, I have my husband and so I am lucky. I do miss my family and friends very much.

15. What are you most looking forward to, when pandemic-related restrictions have been lifted? Do you think your post-pandemic life will be different from your pre-pandemic life? In what ways?

Traveling and a real vacation is what I miss. Having raised 4 children and not having very much money earlier in life, my husband and I had just started taking trips together when the children got done school and moved out. We went on several fun trips with other couples in big groups and it was just so very fun. In November of 2019 my husband and I went alone to Las Vegas and took a helicopter ride over Hoover Dam and into the Grand Canyon. We'll never forget how much fun we had. We took the train from Brunswick to Boston and had fun there before flying out of Logan to Nevada. I lay in bed in the morning now and hear the train coming into the Brunswick station at 4 a.m. and think to myself - I want to get on that train again and take off!

16. What do you think you will remember most about this time? What would you like people in the future to understand about your current experience?

Unfortunately, I think I'll remember how people were so divided and I would like people in the future to try and understand it was a public health crisis and that what everyone does and how everyone handles it impacts each other.

17. This space is for any reflections you'd like to put here. (4000 character limit)

18. By checking the box below, you agree to allow your answers to be added to the Documenting Bowdoin & COVID-19 archive of the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives and made available openly and permanently online. *

☒ I agree to the above terms.

